

Testimony of Jean Bouteiller before the Environment Committee in support of H.B. 6263

Dear Co-Chairmen Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, and Members of the Environment Committee,

I am a "10 Mil landowner" in Cornwall and I am here to testify in support of H.B. 6263.

For nearly a century the 10 mil program has successfully conserved forests in Connecticut. Most owners of 10-mil land will soon reach their 50-year anniversary of being in the program, when our properties and timber will be reassessed at highest and best use values, instead of actual "use-value" causing dramatic increases in our taxes. I do not believe that originators of the 10-mil program foresaw the tremendous rise in property values that has occurred in the last 50 years. Nor do I believe that it was their intent that landowners, who stayed with the long-term commitment of forest conservation, be punished for their efforts with huge tax bills.

H.B. 6263 provides a compromise that would allow our property taxes to increase at our 50-year anniversary, but be capped at the same per-acre rate paid by forest landowners in the Public Act 490 program. This bill also provides an option to convert from the 10-mil program into the P.A. 490 program without penalty by first placing a conservation easement on the property, further ensuring the preservation of the forest land. Because the costs associated with this second option would be prohibitive for many it is important to retain the option of capping our taxes at the P.A. 490 rate.

For more than 100 years my 10-mil property has been the lifeblood of my family. From the crops and animals raised on the land to the game, pelts, timber, and firewood harvested from the forest this land has fed, clothed, and warmed us.

While it is true that 10-mil forestlands benefit the individual owners, it is also true that the benefits reach much further. Forests provide increasingly scarce habitat for plants and wildlife, water and air filtration, erosion control, and carbon sequestration, all global objectives. Forests also help to maintain the rural character of our town, a key objective for citizens of Cornwall. If our taxes increase beyond the P.A. 490 rate, the tax burden may force many of us to sell or develop our land in order to pay the bill. How ironic that would be! Development of these properties would mean more houses, more people, and more strain on town budgets. The cost to service these increases is far greater than tax revenues generated by these increases. Forests require far lower expenditures for services, thus help to maintain lower property taxes for all.

We live in a time when forest conservation is a key element in the climate change equation. Please support H.B. 6263 to help protect family forestlands and the benefits they provide to all. Help prevent the tragic and unfair end to a program that has protected Connecticut family forests for nearly 100 years. Thank you.